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RUSKIN, LOVE, AND WOMEN

These pictures are printed not merely because it is spring, when young men's fancy lightly or heavily and crudely turns to thoughts of love.

They are printed chiefly to gain your attention for Ruskin's ideas on woman, condensed here, in his book from "Sesame and Lilies." The chapter on "Lilies:"

Judge a man by what he thinks, says and does about women.

Man's attitude toward woman, his respect for her or lack of it, is a reflection of his attitude toward his own mother.

This page, devoted to Ruskin, the admirable English writer, and his attitude toward women, will attract the attention of young Americans, thanks to Miss Brinkley's picture. It represents her idea of respectful affection. Observe the young man's humble attitude at the bottom of the picture.

And at the last, see the small drawing of Dante, the great Italian of more than six hundred years ago, and Beatrice, the inspiration that led him through life and dictated his descriptions of Heaven in the "Divine Comedy"—description more beautiful than any other in all literature.

Some young American gentlemen will be amused by the picture of stern-faced old Dante, in his strange costume, worshiping youthful Beatrice. She always remained in his memory as he first saw her when they were both children at the house of her father, Folco Portinari, six hundred and forty years ago, although she married another, had children and died young. And he married another woman, a lady of fierce temper, and became father of five sons and one daughter.

The trouble with some young Americans, unlike Dante, is their failure to take young women seriously. The young American, seeing a modern Beatrice, will say in his haste, "Gee, some peach," and pass on. Different are these lines of Dante:

> "I spake; and on me straight Beatrice look'd, with eyes that shot forth sparks of love celestial, in such copious stream, that, virtue sinking in me overpower'd, I turned; and downward bent, confused, my sight."

The mistake of American women and others is that they undervalue themselves.

An English poet, Patmore, expresses it well:

> "Ah, wasteful woman * * * she who may
> On her sweet self set her own price,
> Knowing he cannot choose but pay—
> How has she cheapen'd Paradise;
> How given for naught her priceless gift,
> How spoiled the bread and spill'd the wine,
> Which, spent with due, respective thrift,
> Had made brutes men and men divine."

The greatest men have had the greatest respect for women.

Being intelligent, they have realized the part that women play, guiding and perfecting men.

Ruskin writes:

> "Shakespeare has no heroes; he has only heroines. There is not one entirely heroic figure in all his plays except the slight sketch of Henry V."
>
> "Whereas there is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope and errorless purpose; Cordelia, Desdemona, Isabella, Hermoine, Imogen, Queen Katherine, Perdita, Sylvia, Viola, Rosalind, Helena, and last, and perhaps loveliest, Virginia, all faultless—conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity.
>
> "Then observe, secondly,
>
> "The catastrophe of every play is caused always by the folly or fault of a man; the redemption, if there be any, is by the wisdom and virtue of a woman, and failing that, there is none."

Among Shakespeare's great plays, there is only one weak woman, Ophelia. "She failed Hamlet at the critical point." The poor lady can not be blamed. She was mad, and Hamlet's masculine stupidity, vacillation and uncertainty drove her mad.

The reading of Shakespeare is an excellent thing for young men, because it teaches respect and admiration for women.

> "He represents them as infallibly faithful and wise counsellors, * * * incorruptibly just and pure examples * * * strong always to sanctify, even when they cannot save."

It is with Walter Scott as with Shakespeare. His young men are aimless, not strong in purpose. "Whereas in his imaginations of women * * * in the characters of Ellen Douglas, of Flora MacIvor, Rose Bradwardine, Catherine Seyton, Diana Vernon, Lilias Redgauntlet, Alice Bridgenorth, Alice Lee, and Jeanie Deans * * * with endless varieties of grace, tenderness and intellectual power we find in all a quite infallible and inevitable sense of dignity and justice."

Ruskin observes that with great writers, "it is the woman who watches over, teaches and guides the youth; it is never, by any chance, the youth who watches over or educates his mistress."

Of Dante, he writes:

> "You know well the plan of Dante's great poem, * * * that it is a love poem to his dead lady; a song of praise for her watch over his soul.
>
> "Stooping only to pity, never to love, she yet saves him from destruction—saves him from Hell. He is going eternally astray in despair; she comes down from Heaven to his help, and throughout the ascents of Paradise is his teacher, interpreting for him the most difficult truths, divine and human, and leading him, with rebuke upon rebuke, from star to star."

With the Greeks, Italians, Romans, all men whose minds are developed, it is the same. Woman is honored because she deserves honor. Go wherever you will, choose your period, if men are worthy, you find their attitude the same.

> "I would take Chaucer, and show you why he wrote a legend of good women, but no legend of good men. I would take Spenser, and show you how all his fairy knights are sometimes deceived and sometimes vanquished; but the soul of Una is never darkened, and the spirit of Britomark is never broken."

In ancient stories of chivalry the lady buckles on the armor of her knight errant. Ruskin says:

> "You cannot think that the buckling on of the knight's armor by his lady's hand was a mere caprice of romantic fashion. It is the type of an eternal truth—that the soul's armor is never well set to the heart unless a woman's hand has braced it; and it is only when she braces it loosely that the honor of manhood fails."

Ruskin writes not only of Shakespeare, Dante, Chaucer, Greeks and other ancients and their reverence for women. He writes for modern husbands, who are all that they ought to be in the stage of courtship, and nothing worth talking about afterward.

> "We think it (absolute devotion) right in the lover and mistress, not in the husband and wife. That is to say, we think that a reverent and tender duty is due to one whose affection we still doubt, and whose character we as yet do but partially and distantly discern; and that this reverence and duty are to be withdrawn when the affection has become wholly and limitlessly our own, and the character has been so sifted and tried that we fear not to entrust it with the happiness of our lives. Do you not see how ignoble this is, as well as how unreasonable? Do you not feel that marriage—when it is marriage at all—is only the seal which marks the vowed transition of temporary into untiring service, and of fitful into eternal love?"

The "superior sex" question is disposed of by Ruskin, for the foolish question it is.

"We are foolish, and without excuse foolish, in speaking of the 'superiority' of one sex to the other, as if they could be compared in similar things.

"Each has what the other has not; each completes the other, and is completed by the other; they are in nothing alike, and the happiness and perfection of both depend on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give."

The word "home" is a much abused noun in the American language. It may mean a preposterous pile of brick and iron built by some profiteer, or a wretched dwelling, both alike in that there is nothing of a "home" in them.

This is Ruskin's definition of home:

> "It is the place of peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in."

Fathers and mothers that control daughters unwisely read this Ruskin paragraph:

> "Do not think you can make a girl lovely, if you do not make her happy. There is not one restraint you put on a good girl's nature, there is not one check you give to her instincts of affection or of effort—which will not be indelibly written on her features, with a hardness which is all the more painful because it takes away the brightness from the eyes of innocence, and the charm from the brow of virtue."

Ruskin rebukes foolish falsehood in the song that Caruso sings so sweetly: "Woman is changeable, like a feather in the wind."

"No," says Ruskin; "nor yet variable as the shade by the light, quivering aspen made; but variable as the *light*, manifold in fair and serene division, that it may take the color of all that it falls upon, and exalt it."

Concerning education of girls, which should interest fathers, because the daughter (not the son) inherits the father's qualities, Ruskin says:

> "If there were to be any difference between a girl's education and a boy's, I should say that of the two the girl should be the earlier led, as her intellect ripens faster, into deep and serious subjects; and that her range of literature should be not more, but less, frivolous, calculated to add the qualities of patience and seriousness to her natural poignancy of thought and quickness of wit; and also to keep her in a lofty and pure element of thought. I enter not now into any question of choice of books; only be sure that her books are not heaped up in her lap as they fall out of the package of the circulating library, wet with the last and lightest spray of the fountain of folly."

As to a girl's reading, Ruskin says:

> "Turn her loose into the old library every wet day and let her alone. She will find what is good for her; you cannot; for there is just this difference between the making of a girl's character and a boy's—you may chisel a boy into shape, as you would a rock, or hammer him into it, as you would a piece of [illegible] cannot hammer a girl into anything. She grows as a flower does—she will wither without sun; she will decay in her sheath, as the narcissus does, if you do not give her air enough; she may fall and defile her head in dust if you leave her without help at some moments of her life; but you cannot fetter her; she must take her own fair form and way; if she take any, and, in mind and in body, must have always
>
> *"'her household motions light and free*
> *and steps of virgin liberty.'*
>
> "Let her loose in the library, I say, as you do a fawn in a field. It knows the bad weeds twenty times better than you, and good ones, too, and will eat some bitter and prickly ones, good for it, which you had not the slightest thought were good.

Many women should read Ruskin's opinion of pitiful stupid "social ambition," that causes so many women to waste life and energy:

> "I am surprised at no depths to which, when once warped from its honor, humanity can be degraded. I do not wonder at the miser's death, with his hands, as they relax, dropping gold. I do not wonder at the sensualist's life, with the shrowd wrapped about his feet. I do not wonder at the single handed murder of a single victim—done by the assassin in the darkness of the railway, or reed—shadow of the marsh.
>
> "But this is wonderful to me, to see the tender and delicate woman among you with her child at her breast, and a power, if she would wield it, purer than the air of Heaven, and stronger than the seas of earth; to see her abdicate this majesty to play at precedence with her next door neighbor."

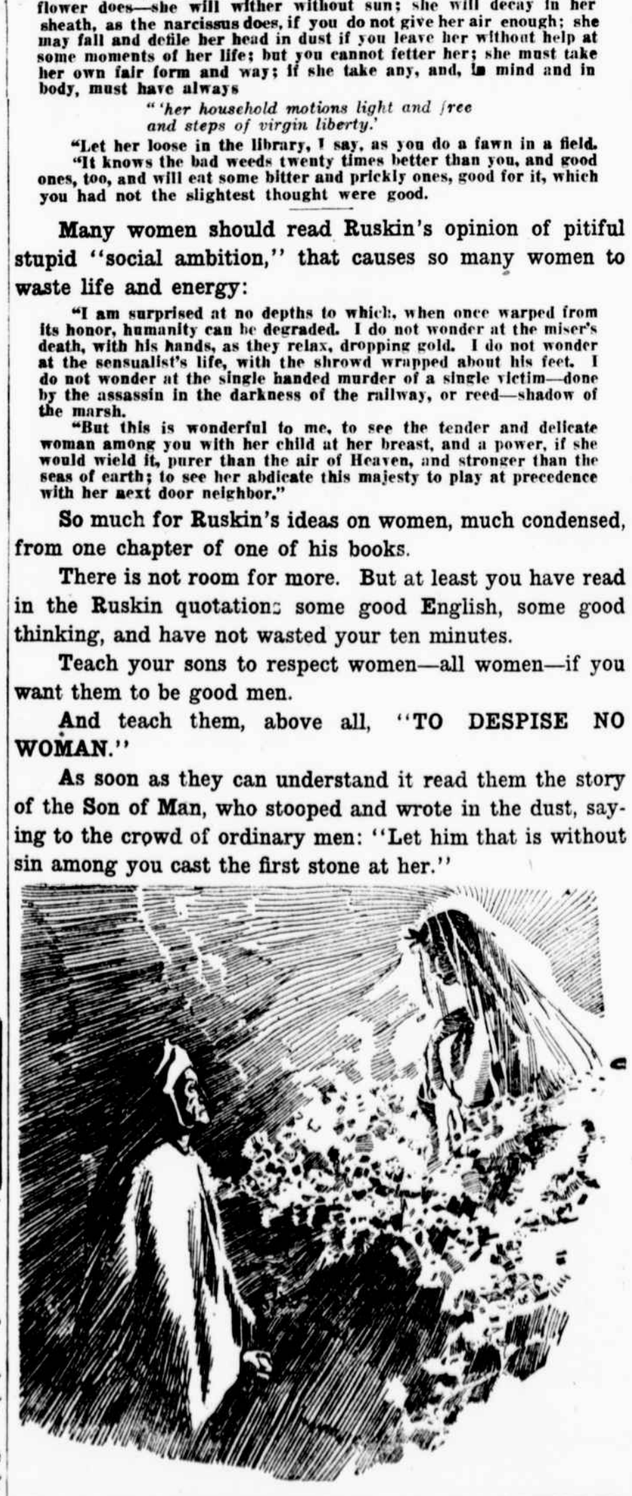
So much for Ruskin's ideas on women, much condensed, from one chapter of one of his books.

There is not room for more. But at least you have read in the Ruskin quotations some good English, some good thinking, and have not wasted your ten minutes.

Teach your sons to respect women—all women—if you want them to be good men.

And teach them, above all, "TO DESPISE NO WOMAN."

As soon as they can understand it read them the story of the Son of Man, who stooped and wrote in the dust, saying to the crowd of ordinary men: "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone at her."



THE LOVE THAT MOVES THE SUN IN HEAVEN AND ALL THE STARS.

This picture, by the brilliant young artist Nell Brinkley, illustrates one kind of American boy and girl affection. It is the best kind, probably, the young man considering himself utterly unworthy of the Being of Light and beauty so far above him.

The small picture at the bottom of this page illustrates another and famous affection, that of Dante, the great Italian poet, for the girl Beatrice. She married another, but inspired him all through life. In the book that has made Dante's name live, Beatrice is supposed to lead him through Hell up to Heaven itself.